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Information and information technology use in undergraduate legal education

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Introduction*****

Information literacy is increasingly being well established as an important educational outcome for university graduates of all disciplines, both by universities and employers. The 1997 Goldsworthy Report *The Global Information Economy: The Way Ahead* recommended in the area of enhancing skills formation, education and training that “all tertiary graduates should be information and communication technology literate in their chosen fields of study and expertise by the year 2000” (Goldsworthy, 1997:79). This is being taken up by universities in their statements about graduate attributes which invariably refer to lifelong learning capabilities, information literacy or both of these. The significance of incorporating legal research skills training in law curriculum has been acknowledged since the Pearce Report, a discipline assessment of Australian law schools in 1987 (Pearce, 1987). Despite the growing emphasis on information skills training, research into this area of legal education in Australia has been scant[you can put this in an acknowledgement at the end if you like]The aim of the research described in this paper was to examine the extent of students use of information and information technology (I & IT) in undergraduate legal education, their success rate with using I & IT, and their views on the place of information literacy education. We also wished to determine implications for law school curricula in Australia.

A survey instrument was designed to obtain baseline data about law students in metropolitan Brisbane and their use of I&IT. The written questionnaire was administered to final year law students at Queensland University of Technology, University of Queensland and Griffith University in May 1999.

The primary outcome of this survey is a picture of law students' present experiences with I & IT hitherto unavailable to legal educators. In particular the results of the survey show that, despite the rich information and information technology environment surrounding law students and existing skills training, present legal curriculum does not seem to have succeeded in the task of educating students for effective information problem solving that is critical in legal practice. The remainder of this paper presents some key results of the survey and points towards an alternative curriculum model which may strengthen education lifelong learning and information literacy in legal curriculum.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

(1 PAGE)

Natalie - I suggest that a short review focussing on legal research courses and a little bit of information literacy research is probably all that is necessary here - we probably should include Carmels stuff about information literate law firms

3. DESIGNING AND CONDUCTING THE SURVEY

As we were seeking quantitative data on characteristics, behaviours and beliefs relating to I&IT use by law, **survey research** seemed most appropriate (Neuman, 1994:222). A survey researcher asks people questions in a *written questionnaire* (mail out or hand out) or during an *interview*, then records the answers (Neuman, 1994:28). Surveys are often used in descriptive or explanatory research. The basic purpose of the descriptive survey is to describe characteristics of the population being studied, make specific predictions and “test” relationships (Powell,1991:56).

[

The **descriptive survey questionnaire** technique was the most appropriate in this study for the following reasons:-

- it would be cost-effective and practical to administer (Anderson,1993:7-8)
- it would provide hard quantitative data that would be relatively easy to collect and analyse
- a hand-delivered questionnaire results in a negligible response rate problem (Powell,1991:8)
- it would allow for a significantly sized and representative sample which would improve the reliability of the conclusions to be made about the entire population under study - general rule of thumb is the larger the sample the better (Powell,1991:73)
- questionnaires tend to encourage frank answers largely because it is easier for the researcher to guarantee anonymity (Powell,1991:84)

The **population** of law students at QUT,UQ and GU in Queensland is approximately 4500. As a population group they are relatively homogenous and a smaller - than what? - sample is appropriate in these circumstances (Graziano, 1997:149; Anderson,1993:28). *Final year law students* were used as the *sample* because as the group exiting the legal education process they are in the best position to reflect on legal education and are also most likely to be at the highest level of skills development. In Semester 1 1999, when the survey was administered, the final year student groups at each institution numbered approximately 600 - GU (approximately 80), UQ (approximately 220) and QUT (approximately 300).

The **questionnaire instrument** comprised of four sections that used a “tick a box” question format, and a matrix or grid, question to present in a compact way a series of questions using the same response categories. [See Appendix 1 for sample questions]The final page of the questionnaire contained an “Any other comments” space and a terminology guide. The first section sought information on *Demographic* details such as gender, age group, status as a part-time or full-time student, whether law is first degree and GPA. The second section, entitled *Extent of use of information and information technology*, asked questions about the nature of students' access to a range of information technology and the frequency with which the information technology is used, frequency of visits to the law library, the nature of legal research training received at law school and their perceptions of that training. The third section on the *Nature of use of information and information technology* asked questions about the level of experience in completing a range of information and information technology tasks, such as whether you are always successful in downloading a file from the World Wide Web, and the nature of respondent's attitudes to information literacy. The fourth section of the questionnaire comprised a test to verify answers to questions in the earlier sections of the questionnaire. This *Research Problem* focused on a common legal research task for Australian law and was designed to test ? is test the best word? particularly the answers in section Three of the survey where respondents were asked about the successof their experiences in a range of I & IT activities.

The questionnaire was **piloted** in Semester 2, 1998 and administered in full to final year law students at Queensland University of Technology, University of Queensland and Griffith University in Semester 1 1999.

The statistical analysis software used for data input, management and analysis was **SPSS** (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

4. KEY RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY

(5 PAGES WITH TABLES)

What can we say about the experiences of final year students in 3 Queensland metropolitan universities? The survey provides a detailed picture of the student population as being frequent users of information and IT, as having ample access to the necessary technologies, as considering themselves to be successful users, but as being apparently unable to transfer their supposed skills to relatively simple legal research problems. This significant inability raises questions about students actual, as opposed to perceived, levels of success in their use of information and IT for legal problem solving.

1. Variations in context of experiences eg. influenced by institutions, academics, particular university focuses

2. Use information and IT facilities extensively [quotes in literature]

{ 1 and 2 relate to chapters 4 and 5 }

3. Teaching methods useful

4. Preferred place of training in curriculum – integrated

{3 and 4 relate to chapters 6 and 7 – perceptions of education process}

5. Levels of success eg. usually successful in X and not in Y

6. self perceptions of info and IT skills

{5 and 6 relate to chapter 8}

7. Research problem – not well able to respond to previously un-encountered legal

information problem – important conclusion

{7 relates to chapter 9}

4.1 The typical respondent

A total of 226 response were received from the three universities surveyed. The percentage breakdown of responses by university was 39.8% University of Queensland, 31% Griffith University and 29.2% Queensland University of Technology.

The respondents reflect a common statistic of a greater number of females in law schools than males. 55.8% of respondents were female and 43.8% were male.

The majority of respondents were in their twenties, with 82.7% aged between 20 to 25 years and 10.6% aged 26-30 years. Enrolment as a full-time student was most prevalent with 89.8% of respondents indicating they were full-time students, with 10.2% studying part-time.

The results of the question on whether the LLB was the respondents first degree indicates that for only 53.1% of respondents the LLB is their first degree. It is interesting that with the most represented age group being the 20 to 25 group that so many respondents would have another degree. [this previous sentence needs rewriting] Perhaps it is reflective of the increase in recent years in double degree combinations at law schools.

The final question in the *Demographics* section asked respondents to indicate what range their Grade Point Average (GPA) was in. 50.9% indicated that their GPA was in the range of 5.1 – 6, with 27.4% indicating the 4.1 – 5 range.

Thus, if there is a typical respondent it is a full-time female student, aged between 20 and 25 with a GPA between 5.1 and 6 for whom the LLB is their first degree.

4.2 Extent of use of information and information technology

Information and information technology use amongst the final year law students in Brisbane who responded to the questionnaire is quite extensive. Students surveyed report a high level of access to I & IT and they use the resources frequently.

Approximately 75% of the final year law students in Brisbane visit the law library almost daily or once a week. This response reflects the special relationship between law students and law libraries. The analogy that the law library is to lawyers what the laboratory is to the scientist and the museum is to the naturalist is one that has been used for decades to describe the pivotal role the law library plays in the life of lawyers and law students (Woxland,1989:456).

The nature of access that the respondents have to information technology is significant. Almost all have computer access, including word processor, at home, with roughly 60% also having World Wide Web and email access from home. Interestingly only 77% are aware that computer access is available to them at university.

The frequency of use of information technology amongst respondents is also significant. Approximately 70% use a computer daily with roughly 50% using the World Wide Web, email and word processors each daily, and approximately 30% use cd-roms weekly.

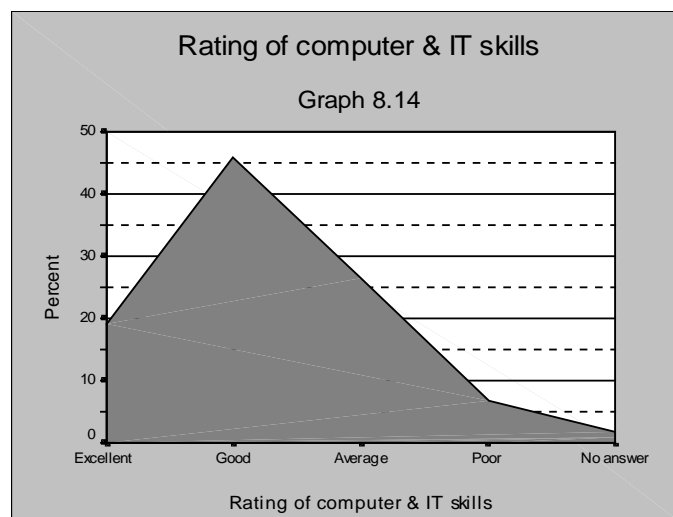
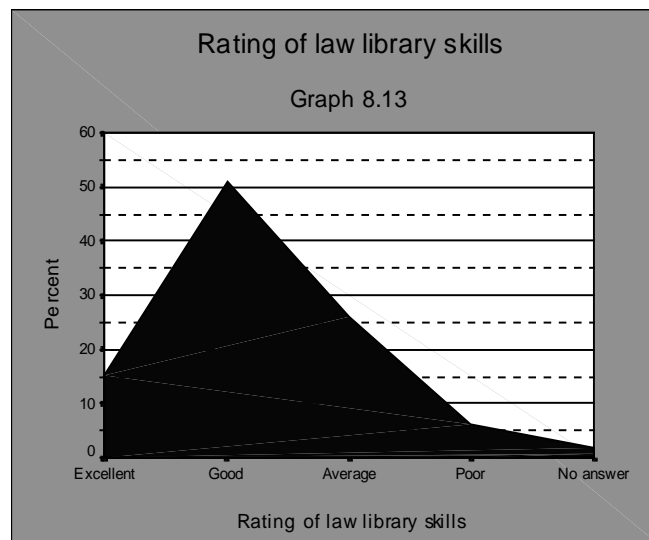
TABLE of BASIC RESULTS?? - YES!

4.3 Success rates with using information and information technology

Task	Always successful	Usually successful	Seldom successful	Not used
Using a word processor to complete an assignment	84.5%	12.4%		.9%
Downloading a file from the World Wide Web	27%	54%	9.3%	7.5%
Using email to communicate with lecturers and students	51.3%	29.2%	3.1%	13.7%
Using legislation annotations to find reprints of legislation	27.4%	40.7%	8.4%	20.8%
Using AustLII to find unreported cases	20.4%	52.2%	10.2%	14.6%
Using case citators to find case citations	24.3%	46.5%	8%	17.7%
Using the library catalogue to find a book on a topic	46.5%	44.7%	3.5%	2.2%
Evaluating whether legal information found is current	14.6%	59.3%	11.1%	11.1%
Finding second reading speeches in Hansard	8.4%	24.8%	10.2%	53.5%
Listing keywords about your research problem	23.9%	59.3%	4%	8.4%
Finding out whether Australia is a party to a	7.5%	17.7%	6.6%	65%

treaty				
Searching full text cd-rom databases of cases	23.5%	38.9%	11.5%	22.6%

Inlcude no asnwer % in table??



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4.4 Analysis of research problem

4.5 Nature of legal research training received

4.6 Perceptions of legal research training and skills

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR LEGAL EDUCATION

Survey results show that the following scenario prevails in contemporary legal education:

- Students use I & IT heavily and have considerable access to the necessary resources
- Students claim to be using I & IT heavily , but they do not appear to be using these resources as effectively as they should be.
- Students are apparently unable to transfer skills they perceive themselves as having to novel situations
- Information skills instruction is presently largely confined to first year and is not integrated into the teaching-learning experiences of subjects other than legal research.
- Students would like to have better integrated and further instruction within their courses.

These findings suggest that the present curriculum model for legal education has several drawbacks in relation to contemporary directions recommended for information literacy education. The present model (see Figure One) largely isolates information skills instruction within the legal research program. This effectively separates it from the broader legal curriculum (this separation is symbolised by the use of a solid black line around Information and IT skills in Figure One). Legal research courses assume a level of information and IT skills that is not reflected across the range of varying levels of skills and experiences of students. It appears that students needs remain largely unaccommodated by legal research courses, which may be said to concentrate on bibliographic instruction rather than legal information literacy. [may need to explain this further]

Further, legal research courses do not influence or shape legal curriculum to the extent that they could. So, although they are considered core to the curriculum, they remain somewhat isolated, a factor represented by the black line separating legal research from legal curriculum in Figure One.

Modifying the situation that has emerged from this survey to make it consonant with what is considered to be 'best practice' (Candy et al etc), suggests the need for a new model of legal education. In this new model (see Figure 2) graduate attributes are central and legal curriculum shapes these attributes. In this new curriculum all aspects of the curriculum

inform each other. Curriculum is designed according to principles of lifelong learning and information literacy education.

[Natalie, I think that the second diagram should have no fine lines at all - just fluid!]

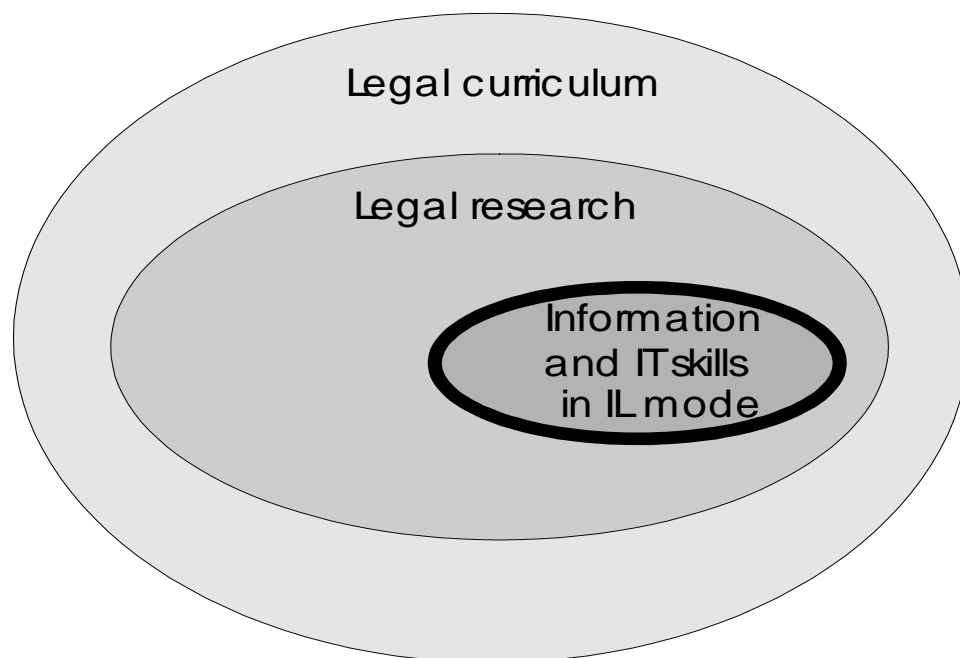
On this basis we recommend:

- the development of general principles for information and information technology use in undergraduate legal education that encourage these as lifelong learning skills,
- the identification of a set of relevant information and information technology skills for contemporary legal education , and
- the development of a conceptual framework/model for the application of information literacy principles to legal research courses in law school curriculum

PRESENT

Information and IT skills in an IL mode in present legal research courses sit mostly in isolation. Elements of information literacy are taught within legal research courses, but not in an integrated or influencing manner, hence the heavy black.

Are the first and third paras all that are necessary here?? Define I and It skills here?



FUTURE

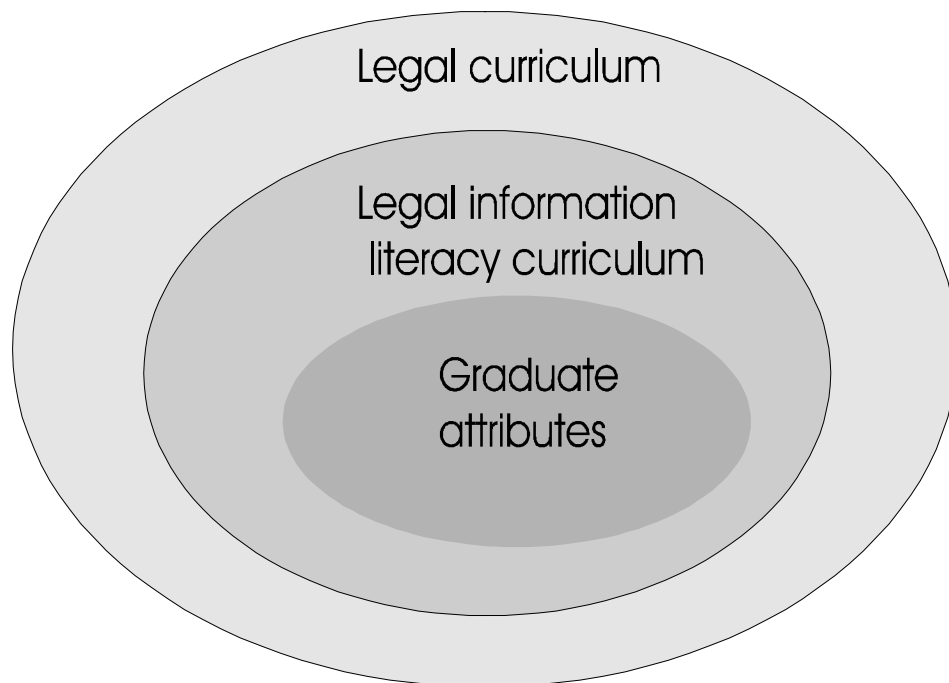
Current trends in higher education suggest this type of model.

Legal research is core to a process driven curriculum and is subsumed within the content that is the essence of the core/legal curriculum??

**Graduate attributes are being informed by legal information literacy and vice versa.
There are no barriers, the interaction is fluid, hence no black line.**

Collectively graduate attributes and legal information literacy inform and are infused within legal curriculum.

Legal information literacy includes research methods etc???



6. CONCLUSION

((1/2 – 1 PAGE))

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